



raucanians



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THE ARAUCANIANS

DIE FIGHTING RATHER THAN SURRENDER! These words guided the unconquerable Araucanian Indians of South America. They and the Seminoles of Florida are the only Indian tribes of the Americas never conquered by force.

The Araucanians were a part of the tribe called Mapuches or "peoples of the country," who lived on the land that is now the Republic of Chile. The Spaniards called the groups which settled south of the Bío Bío River *Araucanians*, a name which has come to mean "unsubdued Indians."

The Incas of Peru and later the Spaniards attempted to conquer the Araucanians, but they never succeeded in weakening the strong sense of independence which distinguishes the Araucanians even today.

Incas under the leadership of Inca Tupac Yupanqui invaded the land which is present-day Chile in the middle of the 15th century. After numerous long battles, they conquered the region down to the River Maule, but they could not make the freedom-loving Araucanians surrender. The Araucanians kept moving southward to keep their independence. Finally the Incas gave up. They made the River Maule the southern boundary of their empire and never again tried to go beyond it.

The Spaniards met Araucanian resistance soon after Pedro de Valdivia founded the city of Santiago in the middle of the 16th century. The Spaniards and the Araucanians battled with few interruptions until the second half of the 19th century, when the Indians became citizens of the Republic of Chile of their own free will.

Before the Spaniards arrived in Chile, the Araucanians lived in family units. Each unit had its own *cacique* or chief. These independent groups fought each other, usually to gain food or to settle real or imagined injuries. When not fighting, they lived simply by hunting, fishing and doing some farming.

The Araucanians first banded together when the Spanish *conquistadores* invaded their land. One of the Araucanians' great leaders, Lautaro, convinced his fellow-Indians that the Spaniards were not gods and that they could be defeated in battle. It was he who persuaded the Indians to make sharp, unexpected attacks against the Spaniards instead of meeting them in open warfare. Lautaro led his enthusiastic followers to victory several times before he was killed in combat.

Upon his death, the Araucanians chose a new *toqui* or war chief, named Caupolicán, immortalized by Alonso de Ercilla in his famous epic poem *La Araucana*. He was picked through the Araucanians' unique way of



Statue of Caupolicán in Santiago

Laja Falls in
southern Chile



selecting a leader during wartime. A group chief sent a messenger with a bloodstained arrow to the chief of a nearby tribe. He called his people together and if they agreed on war, he sent the arrow on to the next tribe. The message was carried in this way from tribe to tribe until all had been notified. Then all the tribes gathered in a given spot to choose their leader.

Araucanian men had to compete for the position of war chief by the severe "test of the log," which eliminated all weaklings. The man who could hold a certain heavy log the longest became chief. In the contest held after Lautaro's death, Lincoyan, a young group chief, had broken the record by holding the log aloft for eighteen hours. Then Caupolicán, chief of a neighboring group, arrived and insisted on taking his turn. Eagerly, he lifted high the heavy log and placed it upon his shoulder. Hundreds of Indians watched day and night as he strode back and forth with measured stride. On the third day, after breaking Lincoyan's record, Caupolicán flung down his burden. A spontaneous roar from

the watching crowd gave proof of their faith in this powerful man whom they hailed as their leader.

The people urged Caupolicán to lead them immediately into battle against the Spaniards. He, however, was as wise as he was brave. He advised them to return home, prepare their weapons and await his call. In November, 1557, Caupolicán gave his people the signal to fight. The natives fought bravely, but fell before the superior weapons of the Spaniards. The Spaniards captured Caupolicán and tortured him to death, but he never showed how much he suffered. This was the first of more than a dozen general uprisings of the Araucanians. The Spaniards won most of the battles, but the Araucanians always came back for more.

At the beginning of the 17th century, Governor Alonso García Ramón and Father Luis de Valdivia, who were among the first of the Spaniards to treat the Indians as human beings, took a step which freed the Indians from forced labor and taxed them instead. They planned to use the tax money to improve the natives' welfare. The Indian chiefs liked this plan and, as a result, declared their loyalty to the King of Spain. However, the plan did not take into consideration the fact that the Indians lived in scattered groups, not as an organized nation under one ruler. It was not successful. Father Valdivia wanted the Spaniards to avoid using brute force on the Indians and to bring about slower, but more lasting results, by education and example. His policy eventually proved



Araucanian girls in their native dress

to be the right one, but he did not live to see its success.

The first of numerous peace parleys or "pow-wows" was held in 1612 when the Spaniards saw that they would have to negotiate with the natives. Many other parleys followed, but none resulted in lasting peace. General Ambrosio O'Higgins, father of Chile's national hero, Bernardo O'Higgins, did much to make the Araucanians feel a part of the Spanish colony. Among other things he gave them the right to trade freely. They responded to his tact and justice, his deep understanding and sincerity.

Chile's war for independence began a new era of bloodshed for the Araucanians. Both the Patriots and the Spanish Royalists tried to enlist the Indians on their side. After Chile won its independence from Spain, Bernardo O'Higgins, who was the first Chilean President, worked hard to organize the Indians and in 1825 the new Republic granted them the same rights as other Chileans.

The last great Araucanian uprising came in 1881 when Chile was engaged in a war against Peru and Bolivia. However, General Basilio Urrutia soon suppressed it in a severe but just and wise manner.

The ancient Araucanians never planned for the future, except when facing a military campaign. If the fishing and hunting were good they lived well. But if there was no food, they just made the best of it and sometimes existed for weeks on a few roots and water. They spent

Guanacos once played an important part in the life of the Indians



Araucanian woman weaving



little time tilling the fields. They built no cities or temples. They constructed no highways to connect the various regions where the neighboring tribes lived. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, weaving was their only handicraft. This craft showed originality in design and an artistic appreciation of color combinations. Today, weaving is still their most highly developed industry, carried on exclusively by the women.

The Araucanians lived in simple huts, usually located in ravines, on the banks of streams or deep in the forest. These huts, or *rukas* as they were called, consisted of a few forked poles placed upright in the ground. Sticks laid crosswise joined the poles at the top. The roof was of straw laid over the sticks. Hides of animals drawn around the outside of the poles formed the walls. A pile of straw in the corner was the bed and a log was the pillow. One small room contained all the objects the family used. On the floor were skins of animals, plant fibers and guanaco wool, used in weaving. The weapons used in war or for hunting usually hung from the poles. In the center of the *ruca* was a hole in the floor where they built a fire. Here they cooked their food in pots of clay.

The Araucanians were particularly fond of vegetables, with fish and



An Araucanian family performing daily tasks

meat rounding out their diet. To cook the food they heated stones until they were red-hot, then threw them into the pots which contained the food and some waer. They stirred this mixture until it was cooked to their taste. Often they ate it raw. Pieces of hollowed tree trunks served as dishes.

The guanaco, a member of the llama family, played an important part in the lives of the Indians. They used its hide for clothing, rugs and later on for saddle cloths, and its meat for food.

The warlike Araucanians, famous for their physical strength, were of medium height and broad-chested. They had large heads, round faces, narrow foreheads, prominent cheekbones, piercing dark eyes and swarthy complexions. Although they valued a thick head of hair, they took great pains to remove all body hair, using sharp stones or shells to take it out by the roots. Their usually sad and somber expression portrayed dignity and determination. From ancient times they bathed daily. This was an early morning ritual no matter what the weather was like.

Araucanian men had definite ideas of beauty in a woman. She must be of medium height, with thick, black hair and long, black eyelashes. Thick legs and big feet were desirable because they showed that she was strong. A woman had to be sturdy because she did so much of the heavy work; she cultivated fields, prepared food, made clothes and dishes, kept the weapons in condition and, when her husband went to

war, accompanied him; she carried the weapons and prepared his food.

In ancient times the men had several wives. A woman was property and was treated practically like a slave. She could be sold by the male members of her family. In the home, the man ate first, then the older male children. Afterward, the mother and daughters ate what food remained. Today, women enjoy a position of greater respect as most men take only one wife.

The original Araucanian costume was a simple garment shaped like a sleeveless shirt. Strips of rawhide or wool held it together at the sides and shoulders. Later on the men drew this garment together between the legs in diaper-like fashion; the women tied it in at the waist with a belt and wrapped a large shawl around their shoulders. Today, the men have more or less adopted European dress but the women resist any changes. Their only touches of feminine finery are silver ornaments. Before the Spaniards came they wore necklaces, rings and bracelets of beads, snail shells or green stones.

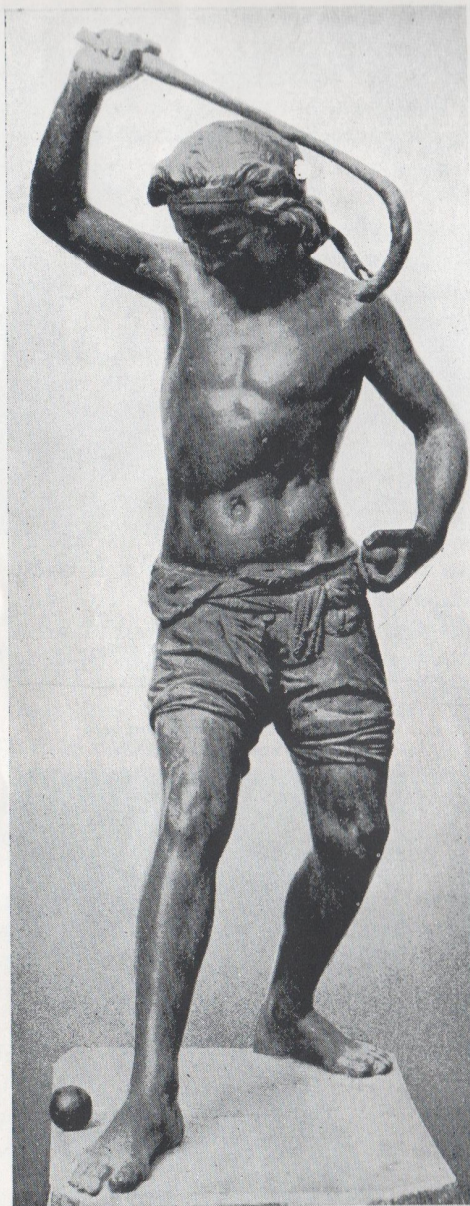
Neither the father nor mother paid too much attention to the children while they were babies. However, when a girl reached the age of seven or eight, her mother began to teach her how to do a woman's work. The father usually remained indifferent to his sons until they were nine or ten. Then he taught them how to shoot a bow and arrow and to handle a lance and club. A boy was considered a man when he could use these weapons skillfully.

Araucanian women bind their braids with silver bands



Years ago, Araucanian men dressed in this manner





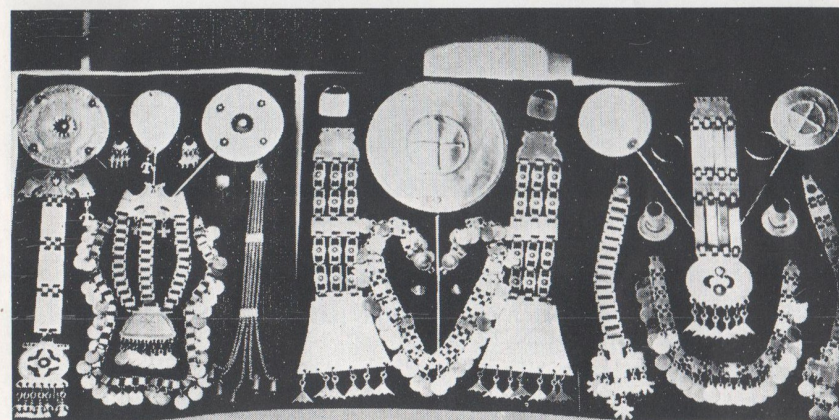
"The chueca player" by Nicanor Plaza

Vigorous games played a great part in developing the strength of the men. A favorite was *chueca*, a game similar to hockey. The Araucanians used a hazel wood club with a curved end to drive the ball. Each side chose a team of from six to eight players. Then the betting began. If a player did not bet, he could not play. Stripped from the waist up, the players formed two lines facing each other. A wooden ball was placed in a hole in the center of the field and the two best players, one from each side, began the game by trying to hit it out of the hole. The one who succeeded, tried to drive the ball toward the goal at full speed. His team followed, supporting him. The opposing team tried to get the ball away. If either side made a goal, the ball was put back in the center and the play started all over again. When one side scored two goals, they changed positions. If the losers scored a goal, it was subtracted from the two scored by the other side, so that the score stood one-one. If the losers scored again, the score was "all square" and the play began all over again. A game lasted until one side scored four goals. On the night before a game, members of the two teams slept with their ball clubs at the head of their beds. If they had a good

dream, it was taken as a sign of victory, but if they had a bad one it meant defeat and nothing could persuade them to play.

In another game two players stood up and, at a given signal, seized each other by the hair, each trying to throw the other to the ground. One of the Araucanians' most unusual contests was that of silence. They loved to talk, but they sometimes sat for hours, even days, without speaking. The one who kept quiet the longest, won.

Although the Araucanians were warlike toward strangers, they were very hospitable to friends. On meeting, they would spend as long as fifteen minutes inquiring about the health and welfare of each other's family before beginning their main conversation, which sometimes lasted many hours. Strangely enough, they often carried on these conversations sitting back to back.



Samples of modern Araucanian silverwork

The Araucanians were famous as orators, training from the time they were very young. Their best story-tellers were the elders of the tribe who would spin tales while the others worked around the fire in the evening. Sometimes their stories were of their ancestors and the great feats they had performed in wartime; sometimes they were of witches, magic and mystery.

The Araucanians had no formal religion. However, they did believe in *Ngenechen* (the ruler of mankind), in life after death and in the power of the spirit of an ancestor to protect them. Tradition and superstitions guided their behavior. Actions which could be explained by their traditions and superstitions were good; those that could not be were bad. One of their most pronounced traits was their deeply-rooted belief in enchantments, sorcery and dreams. They placed great im-



Indian handicrafts on sale at Valparaiso dock

portance on the antics of a fox whose cunning they admired.

The only group celebration of a religious nature among the Araucanians was *Ngillatun*. Other religious rituals were private. *Ngillatun*'s origin probably lies in the legend of the great Deluge, or flood, when the people saved themselves by taking refuge on a tri-peaked mountain which floated. According to the legend two mythical animals fought: one to make the waters rise, the other to make them recede. The struggle ended and the waters receded when the people offered up prayers and made sacrifices.

The chiefs would decide when it was time to hold this religious festival and one or several settlements took part in it. A bad crop, a disease among the animals or just a long lapse of time since the last festival were reasons for holding it. The ceremonies were held around a *rewe*, or ladder, cut into the trunk of a tree and adorned with cinnamon branches. The *rewe* was the only type of temple the Araucanians had. The *machis* (similar to the medicine men in North American tribes) conducted the *Ngillatun* ceremonies. The people danced around the *rewe* to the music of flutes and drums. On the second day of the festival they sacrificed a lamb and asked *Ngenechen* to help them. The chief *machí* chanted a request suitable to the occasion, which the



An Araucanian farmer of today

other *machis* repeated. Then she, for the *machí* was usually a woman, climbed up into the branches of the *rewe*. There she went into a trance. She repeated to the people the words of *Ngenechen* which she supposedly heard, then fell, as if fainting, into the arms of the flute players or into a blanket which was held beneath the *rewe*. Prayers, feasting and drinking continued throughout the festival.

Funerals, too, were a time of feasting and ceremony. Speakers, in long orations, told of the wonderful deeds performed by the deceased during his lifetime. Now and then, women would interrupt the speech by singing mournful choruses. A grave was lined with stones before the coffin was placed in it. Objects used by the person in life—weapons, dishes, a pipe or some musical instrument—were placed around the coffin. A dead chief's arms and uniform were buried with him, while a lance of white *quila* feathers fluttered over the grave to show his high rank. A year after the funeral, people again visited the grave to talk to the deceased and inform him of events which took place after his death. Again they recalled his brave deeds, had a final feast and then left him in peace forever.

Courage, vigor and patriotism were the outstanding characteristics of the Araucanians. There is no doubt that their fear of being cap-



A snowcapped volcano in the Araucanian country

tured in war and carried from their homeland to a place where they could have no hope of being buried near their ancestors spurred them on to great deeds of valor.

More than 100,000 descendants of these hardy people still live on their lands south of the Bío Bío River. Their number is slowly increasing. They are much better farmers than their ancestors, raise large herds of cattle and excel as horsemen. Some are now skilled craftsmen who make beautiful objects of silver, weave unusual blankets and shawls, make fine saddles and other leather work and mold attractive pottery. They have learned new ways to work and play from the Spaniards and Chileans, but they still keep many of their old customs.

Present-day Araucanians assist in the redistribution of their communal holdings in the form of private properties. Many are active citizens who work hard as soldiers, teachers and even politicians.

La Araucana

By ALONSO DE ERCILLA

(Part II)

Eager to try his strength, the mighty chief
Seizes the heavy trunk and lifts it high
So easily, it might have been a leaf;
His many rivals, with an envious cry,
Foresee their haughty hopes will come to grief;
A thousand eager watchers, standing by,
See him, Caupolicán, confident, bolder,
Settle the knotty trunk upon his shoulder.

So with the rising sun, the warrior's pace
Quickens the wonder of the gaping throng;
He hurries not, but with a measured grace
Nurses his powers, for the trial is long;
The shadows fall upon his swarthy face
And still he walks, a peer among the strong.
The murmurs run that he, Caupolicán,
Will surely prove to be the better man.

Thus ends the day, and thus begins the night;
The moon brings forth her train of wondering stars
That now behold the warrior's tireless might
And shine upon his noble battle scars,
Until the sun again with eastern light
Beams on the prowess of this son of Mars,
This brave Caupolicán, who holds the log
Light as a feather or a wisp of fog.

And while the warrior walks, the hastening sun
Runs his accustomed race across the sky
Until the western shadows, one by one,
Across the valley's golden twilight lie;
The unwearied brave, his spirit carrying on,
Bows not and carries still the trunk on high;
From Andean heights the darkness silently
Rolls o'er the earth and o'er the southern sea.

Once more the moon, emerging from the dense,
Mysterious forest, pauses on the crest
Of towering peaks and gazes in suspense
Upon the hero of the awful test;
His knotted sinews, glistening and tense,
Carry their burden with unyielding zest.
The stars grow pale; the moon, with drowsy motion,
Dips, wonder-struck, into the arctic ocean.

The sun has risen in his eastern groove
Full in the sky when he, Caupolicán,
Flings down his burden with disdain, to prove
To the astonished warriors of the clan
That his stout heart could heavier burdens move,
And show that he is still the better man;
From the assembly comes a mighty roar:
"Lead us to battle, oh thou son of war."

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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

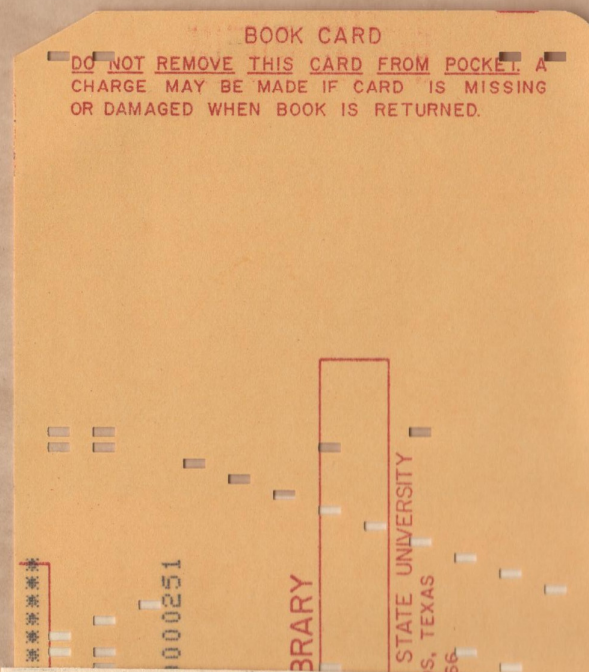
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